

**REMARKS OF REP. EDWARD J. MARKEY
IN SUPPORT OF THE LIFESPAN RESPITE CARE ACT OF 2003**

Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of the Lifespan Respite Care Act of 2003 and in celebration of the nation's family caregivers during National Family Caregivers Month and Alzheimer's Awareness month. This week before Thanksgiving, as we anticipate gathering with family, friends and loved ones, I am privileged to recognize and honor the millions of family caregivers who care for family members with disabling or chronic conditions such as those afflicted by Alzheimer's disease. There is no doubt in my mind that caregivers – those who devote themselves selflessly to caring for loved ones with disease such as Alzheimer's – are the true heroes. I know because my dear mother was a victim of Alzheimer's and my father was a hero caring for her to the day she died.

Today over 4.5 million Americans suffer from Alzheimer's disease. Almost half of all Americans over age 85 suffer from this devastating debilitation. With the graying of the baby boomer population a sharp increase in Alzheimer's disease is expected. Over 70% of people afflicted with Alzheimer's disease live at home, with 75% of home bound care provided by family and friends. There are over 25 million family caregivers in America and by 2020, the number of adults requiring assistance with daily living will increase to almost 40 million, placing a tremendous load on the family caregivers.

We cannot afford to lose any family caregivers to stress or illness. We as a nation can not afford it because family caregivers provide \$250 billion per year in unpaid care. Yet, the lack of support is taking its toll on caregivers. While a large proportion of caregivers report finding an inner strength, significant numbers report serious physical or mental health problems, including headaches, stomach disorders, back pain, sleepless nights and depression. Mortality risks for caregivers are 63% higher than for noncaregivers.

In addition to serious health consequences, many families suffer emotionally and economically. Families of children with disabilities face a significantly higher divorce rate than families of children without disabilities. Lack of respite care has even been found to interfere with the ability of parents of children with disabilities to accept job opportunities.

Without adequate family support, children with disabilities face a nearly 4 times higher risk of abuse and neglect than children without disabilities and the abuse rate of the elderly is unacceptably high.

Respite works. It allows families to remain together and avoid more costly out-of-home placements. Hospitalizations, institutionalization, nursing home and foster care placements have been shown to actually decline when respite or crisis care is the intervention.

This bill will help create a family caregiving respite policy in our country, not just a band-aid solution. Families are under greater stress today than ever before and the numbers who will assume caregiving roles is rising at an alarming rate. Respite works, respite saves money, respite save families. We can not afford to ignore the family care gives any longer. We must give them respite.